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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the nature of student engagement in the instructional activities of eighth- and ninth-grade English classes and draws general conclusions applicable to instruction at all levels. It focuses on the teacher's pivotal role, showing that certain discourse practices elicit substantive (rather than procedural) student engagement, with teachers taking students seriously, and acknowledging and building on what they say. These practices involve: (1) asking authentic questions (which open the floor to what students have to say); (2) engaging in uptake (building on what students have said); and (3) high-level evaluation (which certifies new turns in the discussion occasioned by student answers). By contrast, the teacher-student interaction called "recitation" (in which the teacher asks a series of preplanned questions, initiates all the topics, and rarely interacts with the substance of students' answers except to evaluate them) is rarely more than procedurally engaging. Using examples from a study of eighth- and ninth-grade English, the paper examines substantively engaging instruction, showing how students become most profitably engaged and learn most in classrooms characterized by extensive interaction between students and teacher. The paper is divided into the following sections: "Procedural versus Substantive Engagement"; "Quality of Instructional Discourse as an Indicator of Student Engagement" (an examination and discussion of three samples of classroom talk); "Implications for Writing"; "Student Engagement and Literature Achievement"; and a conclusion. Twenty-four references are attached. (SR)

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Student Engagement: When Recitation Becomes Conversation

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Student Engagement: When Recitation Becomes Conversation

In the stream of critiques of American education that appeared during the 1980s, one persistent theme concerns the apathy and listlessness that seems to characterize secondary school classrooms. Life in schools is "emotionally flat"; neither students nor teachers get very excited about their work. In order to avoid conflicts, challenges, and other disruptions that might be emotionally or intellectually upsetting, teachers and students make bargains that allow both parties to get through their days satisfactorily. Teachers implicitly agree not to demand too much of students, and students acquiesce to the standards of conduct required by teachers. This gloomy picture is painted by several writers: National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983); Sizer (1984); Goodlad (1984); Powell, Farrar, and Cohen (1985); and McNeil (1986).

What role do teachers play in these negotiations? The 1980s studies conclude that teachers are willing participants in the establishment of lifeless but orderly classrooms. McNeil (1986), in particular, describes the strategies teachers use to avoid disturbing the balance of order and control. By avoiding controversial topics, simplifying complex issues, and fragmenting tasks and information into small pieces that can be easily managed, teachers maintain control over students but at the same time eliminate enthusiasm and excitement in their classrooms. From these studies, one might conclude that many teachers have given up trying to engage students, and are just trying to get through the day.

Our research suggests that most teachers seek something different. When asked what an ideal class session is like, many secondary-school teachers cited involved discussions, even arguments, in which students play a large role in directing the flow of topics and ideas. One eighth-grade English teacher put it this way:

> Interviewer: What goes on in a class session that goes [exceptionally well]?
>
> Teacher: [The students] question you back. I give them a question, and they explain it, but then they go a little farther. And when they start asking me questions, that's when I think I know I've got them where I want them: where they're interested enough to want to find out more. Equal interaction; they can go away and I know we've both gotten something out of it.

These teachers were less clear on how one generates such lively class sessions. When asked, some spoke of particular students or classes when discussions just seemed to emerge. The teachers thought it was the students' contributions, not theirs, that made the difference.

In our view, the nature and extent of student engagement depends on contributions from both students and teachers. Instead of a "treaty" in which low academic demands are traded for good behavior, another kind of agreement is possible, one in which interesting challenges are met with willing participation. Although students admittedly play a key role in such bargains, as we were told, the teacher also plays a critical part in initiating activities that foster student engagement.

This chapter examines the nature of student engagement in the instructional activities of eighth- and ninth-grade English classes. It focuses on the teacher's pivotal role, while recognizing nonetheless that teachers cannot create student engagement all by themselves. Using examples from a study of eighth- and ninth-grade English, this chapter examines

substantively engaging instruction, showing how students become most profitably engaged and learn most in classrooms characterized by extensive interaction between students and teacher.

Procedural versus Substantive Engagement

As we explored the activities of junior and senior high classes, we noted two sorts of student engagement. The first, which we call "procedural engagement," characterizes the typical classroom described by the studies noted above. In such classes, students and teachers go through the motions of schooling: they ask and answer questions, assign and carry out homework, and maintain reasonable standards of comportment. Ordinarily, however, they do not grapple in depth with difficult or controversial academic work. Indeed, whereas most students are regularly engaged in school, they are less often engaged in their studies. Conformity to school procedures should not be confused with significant, ongoing engagement with challenging academic problems and issues. More than competence in school procedures, serious learning requires "substantive engagement," a sustained commitment to and involvement with academic work. Rather than a treaty between opposing sides, substantive engagement requires a contract between willing participants.

It is exceedingly difficult to distinguish between procedural and substantive engagement simply by observing students or asking them what they think about in class. From watching students, one can tell whether they are procedurally engaged or disengaged, but not whether they are seriously involved with the work. Substantively engaged students do not all look the same: some may appear to concentrate; others may gaze out the window. Student engagement depends on student effort, but indicators of this will vary with the nature of the curriculum and instructional activities in which students are involved. At the same time, we believe that some

tasks, and some patterns of interaction are inherently more substantively engaging. For these reasons, we study student engagement by examining the classroom activities in which students are involved.

To explore the relation between substantively engaging instruction and student learning, we studied eighth- and ninth-grade English instruction in eight midwestern communities. Sixteen middle schools, which fed into nine high schools, participated in the study. Of the eight communities, six were public school districts: three in small-town or rural areas, with one junior high and one high school apiece; one was suburban, with three middle schools and one high school; and two were urban, adding five middle- and three high schools to our sample. The other two communities contained Catholic high schools that drew students from a number of urban and suburban K-8 feeder schools. Over 1100 students completed tests and questionnaires in the fall and spring of 1987-88 and 1988-89, and the teachers responded to questionnaires and interviews about classroom activities. Further details on the data collection are provided elsewhere (Nystrand and Gamoran, in press; Nystrand, in press).

The examples and general statements below come from this sample of classes, as does the interview quotation presented above. We studied the discourse of instruction as evident in classroom talk and in reading and writing assignments. Our portrayal of procedural and substantive engagement, and their effects, is based on what we saw, and on what the teachers and students had to say.

Quality of Instructional Discourse as an Indicator of Student Engagement

Normally classroom discourse is recitation: the teacher asks a question to test recall, a student makes a response, and the teacher evaluates the answer and then moves on to the next

question. Most of these exchanges occur at a fairly rapid clip of three questions a minute or more, and unless students fail to give acceptable answers, the teacher rarely follows up on a response. By contrast, other teachers engage their students in more probing and substantive discussions, and in the best of these classes, these exchanges resemble conversations in the extent and quality of their interaction.

To clarify some key distinctions between normal classroom discourse and high-quality, substantively engaging talk, we begin by analyzing two excerpts of classroom talk. In the first, a ninth-grade English teacher leads his class in a review of homework and study questions concerning Book I of The Odyssey:

Teacher: According to the poet, what is the subject of the Iliad?

Student: Achilles' anger.

Teacher: Where does the action of the first part of 'Book 1' take place when we enter the story?

Student: On the Achean ship?

Teacher: Well, they're not on their ships. Let's see if we can give you a little diagram . . .

Student: Was it on the shore?

Teacher: Yes, it's on the shore. Let's see if we can kind of visualize where everything is here. [proceeds to draw on the board] . . . Remember that Troy is on the coast of Turkey -- at the time called Asia Minor -- so let's see if we can -- okay -- this is the scene, and all of the ships are anchored -- a thousand ships are anchored here . . . . So the war has been going on now for how long?

Student: Ten years.

Teacher: 'Ten years.' You have to understand -- the battle takes place only during the day time . . . [draws some more on the board] So this is approximately what it looked like. . . . Now the city is immense -- much larger probably than what we consider the [our own city]; it could be as large as all of [our own] County.

Student: And the wall ran completely around it?

Teacher: Yes.

Student: Didn't they put a wall up in Ireland?

Teacher: In Ireland? I'm not familiar with that. . . . So, let's take a look at some of the other questions. . . . What's the story behind the quarrel -- it deals with Achilles and Briseis and Agamemnon and Chryses and Chryses' daughter Chryseis and how Agamemnon takes Chryseis away from Achilles to replace the prize Chryseis who has gone back to her father. What is the result of the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles?

Student: He's not going to participate in the battle anymore.

Teacher: 'He's not going to participate in the battle anymore.' What's the common custom of Greek warfare and prizes?

Student: That the prizes that they get . . .

[Recitation continues]

In this instructional episode, the teacher initiates nearly all the questions and neither picks up nor follows up on any student response. The teacher does no probing here, no working with responses that students make. One gets the impression that the teacher here follows a script, that he has planned the questions ahead of time, has asked them before, and, if he teaches this lesson again, will ask them again and in the same order regardless of who is in the

class. And it is not just the questions that have been planned. For each question, the teacher has a particular answer in mind, as well: there are clearly right and wrong answers here. The purpose of this exchange is to test student knowledge.

This example of instructional discourse is recitation, which, as Mehan (1979) notes, typically consists of an **initiation** (the teacher's question), a **response** (a student's answer), and an **evaluation** (the teacher's response to the student's answer). Typically, teachers' evaluations of student answers are a perfunctory "Right" or "Wrong," a "Good" or an "Okay," sometimes merely a nod, sometimes nothing (indicating a satisfactory student response). This three-part structure characterizes the normal procedures of classroom recitation, and students who regularly participate in such exchanges may be said to be procedurally engaged. Because recitation so completely typifies classroom discourse, we call it **normal classroom discourse.**

Now consider the teacher-student exchange in the following transcript, from another ninth-grade English class studying The Odyssey, which could not be more different:

Teacher:	What does Odysseus do to the guys who eat the [lotus] flower?
First student:	Drags them back by "main force" and ties them.
Teacher:	What do they discover?
Second student:	Don't they land on another island -- is that the one?
Teacher:	Actually, they go to two places in this chapter: the Land of the Lotus Eaters and the Cyclops. What does Odysseus want to do [there]?
Third student:	Make friends and get food, provisions . . . .
Teacher:	Why make friends?
Second student:	What if they can't give it [provisions] to you?

Teacher: That's an important point -- if they can't or won't; let's wait a minute on that. What does [Odysseus] want to do?

Fourth student: He's curious -- wants to find out about the Cyclops, but the Cyclops goes against Zeus' laws.

Teacher: What would have happened if [Cyclops] had not violated Zeus' hospitality laws?

Fourth student: Odysseus' men wouldn't have been killed and Odysseus captured.

Teacher: Odysseus is so wise -- why didn't he know?

First student: When they're going away, how come [Cyclops] is praying to the gods?

Second student: I thought all the Cyclops didn't believe in the gods.

Teacher: They don't, but Odysseus does. He still has to use his own wits --his wisdom -- to get himself out of these scrapes, and, in the cave . . . it's interesting why a non-believer would pray. Where do we see Odysseus' cleverness in the cave?

[Discussion continues]

This teacher-student exchange is noteworthy for the extent to which students as well as the teacher contribute to the discussion. Unlike the first teacher above, this teacher gauges her questions in terms of previous student answers. For example, when the teacher asks, "Why make friends?", she is specifically querying the student who has explained that Odysseus visits the Land of the Lotus Eaters and the Cyclops to "[m]ake friends and get food, provisions . . . ." And when a student explains, "He's curious -- wants to find out about the Cyclops, but the Cyclops goes against Zeus' laws," the teacher follows up by asking, "What would have happened if he [Cyclops] had <u>not</u> violated Zeus' hospitality laws?" The exchange here is a lot like

conversation in that what each person says is largely determined by what has previously been said. Indeed, at the end of this brief excerpt, the discussion veers away from the standard initiation-response-evaluation sequence and moves towards something very conversational: after one student says, following immediately upon the heels of another student, that she "thought all the Cyclops didn't believe in the gods," the teacher, rather than evaluating this response, simply contributes to the point the two students are seeking to articulate, saying, "They don't, but Odysseus does." Despite the apparent absence of a script, this teacher is very well prepared and especially prepared to be flexible. We call this **high-quality classroom discourse**.

Here's another example of high-quality discourse from a ninth-grade class discussion of Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry. Just prior to this exchange, a student (John) has just read his plot summary of chapter 4 aloud to the class, and the teacher has attempted to write his key points on the board.

Teacher [to the class as a whole]: Wow! What do you think about that?

Student: It was very thorough.

Teacher: Yeah, pretty thorough. I had a lot of trouble getting everything down [on the board], and I think I missed the part about trying to boycott. [Reads from the board] " . . . and tries to organize a boycott." Did I get everything down, John, that you said?

John: What about the guy who didn't really think these kids were a pest?

Teacher: Yeah, okay. What's his name? Do you remember?

John: [indicates he can't remember]

Another student: Wasn't it Turner?

Teacher: Was it Turner?

Students: Yes.

Teacher: Okay, so Mr. Turner resisted white help. Why? Why would he want to keep shopping at that terrible store?

John: There was only one store to buy from because all the other ones were white.

Teacher: Well, the Wall Store was white too.

Another student [addressed to John]: Is it Mr. Hollings' store? Is that it?

John: No. Here's the reason. They don't get paid till the cotton comes in. But throughout the year they still have to buy stuff -- food, clothes, seed, and stuff like that. So the owner of the plantation will sign for what they buy at the store so that throughout the year they can still buy stuff on credit.

Teacher [writing on board]: So "he has to have credit in order to buy things, and this store is the only one that will give it to him."

John: [continues to explain]

Teacher: [continues to write on board]

Another student: I was just going to say, 'It was the closest store.'

Teacher [writing on board]: Okay -- it's the closest store; it seems to be in the middle of the area; a lot of sharecroppers who don't get paid cash -- they get credit at that store -- and it's very hard to get credit at other stores. So it's going to be very hard for her to organize that boycott; she needs to exist on credit. Yeah? [nods to another student]

[Discussion continues]

This exchange is noteworthy for the seriousness with which the teacher treats this student's ideas. Unlike the teacher in the first transcript above, who comes to class with a prepared list of questions with prespecified answers, this teacher comes prepared on the spot to deal with what this student has to say. Not only does she "give him the floor" to express himself at some

length; in addition, she attempts to capture his main points by summarizing them on the board and asks for clarification when she is uncertain: "I think I missed the part about trying to boycott: . . . Did I get everything down, John, that you said?" The teacher shows meticulous interest in this student's thinking, and, as a result, there is a genuineness about this teacher's questions that stands in sharp contrast to those in the first transcript above ("What is the subject of The Iliad?", "What's the common custom of Greek warfare and prizes?", "What is Achilles' heritage?", etc.): this third teacher operates on a need-to-know basis, asking each question not just to move on to "the next question" but instead to draw out implications of the previous response -- not to find out what the student doesn't know but instead to engage his thinking and to follow and promote a line of inquiry that he initiated. She does more, however, than merely encourage his expression. Specifically, she plays a key socializing role, modeling the kinds of questions and issues that are germane here to academic discussions of literature; she teaches him to think as a literature scholar might. She asks either open-ended questions (e.g., "What do you think about that?") or questions to which she really doesn't know the answer (e.g., "What's his name?"). These questions, which in our study we call **authentic questions** to distinguish them from **test questions**, signal to students the teacher's interest in what they think and not just whether they know and can report what someone else thinks or has said.

These three transcripts help clarify key differences between the normal classroom discourse of recitation (and procedural engagement), on the one hand, and more extended, probing discussions, which is characteristic of high-quality instructional discourse (and substantive engagement), on the other hand. In normal classroom discourse, as we have noted, the teacher asks a question, gets an answer, evaluates it, and then repeats the cycle with the next question.

If someone gives a wrong or inadequate answer, the teacher repeats or rephrases the question, yet most of the time, the questions the teacher asks depend little upon the answers students give to previous questions. As a result, each teacher-question/student-response/teacher-evaluation unit tends to be discrete and self-contained. This is why the first example above is so choppy: in just eight questions, the teacher asks first about the subject of The Iliad, then about length of the Trojan War, then the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles, and finally the relationship between the gods and men; no topic is covered in much depth. Perhaps this is why one lost student asks, "Didn't they put a wall up in Ireland?"

By contrast, in high-quality classroom discourse, such as the second and third transcripts above, many of the teacher's questions are partly shaped by what immediately precedes them. This process of teachers' incorporating student answers by incorporating them into subsequent questions is called **uptake** (Cazden, 1988; Collins, 1982, 1986), and it is an important way in which teachers engage students in probing discussion. As it so happens, the latter two discussions are noteworthy because the uptake goes both ways: students as well as the teacher inquire about each other's remarks. In the second class, for example, when one student explains that Odysseus wants to "make friends and get food, provisions," another student asks, "What if they can't give [provisions] to you?"

In the second transcript, even when a student brings up something important that the teacher is not quite ready to pursue, the teacher nonetheless puts it "on the agenda" for subsequent discussion. Hence, in response to the student who asks about provisions, the teacher responds, "That's an important point . . . let's wait a minute on that." In our study we call this **high-level evaluation**, which occurs when the teacher ratifies the importance of a student response ("That's an important point") and allows it to modify or affect the course of

the discussion in some way. Another example of high-level evaluation occurs in the third transcript when the teacher responds to the main points of the student's paper by writing them on the board, an act that certifies their importance. Both uptake and high-level evaluation are substantively engaging because, like authentic questions, they are ways in which teachers take students seriously, not merely because they accept these responses as "correct" but rather because they encourage and build on what is noteworthy of future discussion and consideration.

In the first example of recitation, we noted a certain choppiness related to the teacher's having prespecified answers to his questions and then checking off student knowledge, as it were, against a list of essential information and knowledge. This choppiness occurs because the teacher responds less to what the students actually say (as he might in a conversation) and more to what he expects them to say. By contrast, the second and third discussions are noteworthy for the very coherence the first one lacks: through both uptake and high-level evaluation, both the second and third teachers pick up on what students have said, in each case weighing its possibilities for discussion and weaving it into the fabric of an unfolding exchange. The first teacher apparently knows beforehand which questions he will ask and, as a result, can no doubt predict, for the most part, how the recitation will unfold; reenacting the recitation with another class is relatively straightforward, By contrast, the teachers in the second and third examples can neither predict before class how the discussion will play nor easily reenact the same discussion with another class since, as in conversation, exactly what these teachers say depends on what their students, in turn, have said. In terms of discourse, both uptake and high-level evaluation function to "chain" together teacher questions and student responses, and it is this conversation-like quality -- this chaining -- that contributes to its coherence.

The extent to which classroom discourse resembles conversation is in fact an excellent criterion for judging both the instructional quality of classroom discourse and the extent of substantive student engagement. By this, we do not mean to suggest that instruction should be given over to idle chatter, but rather that students are most likely to be substantively engaged when the treatment of subject matter allows for extensive interaction where statements are mutually followed up. In short, students play essential roles in constituting high-quality classroom discourse -- the teacher cannot do it alone -- and this is why it is so substantively engaging and productive. Just as the substance and conduct of student talk are "negotiated" in the process of conversing (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974), substantively engaging instruction is created as teachers and students negotiate topics of instruction (Nystrand and Gamoran, 1988). This is why substantive student engagement is often high in cooperative small-group work and discussion; why it is much less likely in lecture; and why it generally exists in question-and-answer exchange only to the extent that questions are authentic, teacher evaluations are high-level, and uptake is present.

By discussion, we mean turntaking among students and teachers which departs from the normal initiation-response-evaluation structure of classroom discourse and does not obligate students to wait for the teacher's evaluation before responding themselves to another student's response, and where their teacher, rather than evaluating a student response, joins in and becomes a conversant. Discussions typically include relatively few questions; most often these questions clarify ideas and information ("By that do you mean?") and are consequently authentic since, rather than quizzing each other, conversants exchange only that information they actually need to know. In addition, discussion displays regular uptake so long as the conversants listen and respond appropriately to each other.

By small-group work, we mean real small-group work, in which, as with discussion, students have some input into and control over the discourse; we do not mean small-group time that is used to complete worksheets, i.e., "collaborative seatwork." In collaborative work among peers in small groups, all the exchanges are initiated by students, are authentic, and typically exhibit uptake in just the way that discussion and conversation do.

To sum up: High-quality instructional discourse is substantively engaging when teachers take students seriously, acknowledging and building on what they say. By contrast, recitation is rarely more than procedurally engaging since the teacher typically asks a series of preplanned questions, initiates all the topics, and rarely interacts with the substance of students' answers except to evaluate them. Taken together, high-level evaluation, authentic questions, and uptake distinguish classroom discourse when teachers and students interact with each other in mind, and where, as a result, the course of classroom talk depends on what both teachers and students bring to the instructional encounter. When teachers ask authentic questions, they open the floor to what students have to say; when they engage in uptake, they build on what students have said; and when their evaluation of student responses is high, they certify new turns in the discussion occasioned by student answers. These aspects of classroom discourse, which lend **thematic coherence** to the talk by interweaving discussion topics across teacher-student turns, serve to sustain student-initiated ideas and responses and consequently promote articulate thinking.

Procedural engagement is more or less obvious, we have noted, from the direct observation of individual students: they do their work, are not disruptive, pay attention in class, and so on. Though substantive engagement is more subtle and often cannot be directly ascertained through observation of individual students alone, it can be inferred from the quality of student-teacher

and peer interactions where the conversants clearly work with each other in mind, as we have noted above, so that topics are sustained across conversation turns. If procedural engagement characterizes classes where the teacher carefully structures classroom activities, then substantive engagement, by contrast, requires instruction to which both teachers and students contribute.

We may think of the quality of instructional discourse in terms of a continuum. At one end of this continuum is recitation -- repeated cycles of initiation-response-evaluation; at the other end is discussion/conversation. As a given class session moves away from recitation and towards conversation, authentic questions and uptake become increasingly common, and teacher evaluation is transformed into just another conversant turn. High-level evaluation seems to be a transitional form somewhere between initiation-response-evaluation and conversation.

As the two poles of the instructional discourse continuum, recitation and discussion entail sharply different social relationships between teachers and students. In recitation, the teacher initiates and dominates; students are passive and are expected to recall, when asked, what they have learned and to report other people's thinking. What students say affects the conduct of recitation (i.e., the sequence of questions) very little. In discussion, by contrast, the teacher leads but does not dominate. Students are required to be active, not just recalling what they have learned and others have thought but also thinking themselves on the spot. For discussion to work, teacher and students alike must enter a partnership, observing reciprocity and working in terms of each other. Consequently what students say in a discussion can affect both the content and focus of instruction. Students are an essential factor in high-quality instructional discourse, which is why it is substantively so engaging.

Teachers who promote high-quality classroom discourse and students who become so engaged as a result are typically immersed in a dialogue that spans a variety of instructional

activities; and classes devoting significant amounts of time to discussion and peer-group work typically exhibit authenticity, contiguity, and high levels of teacher evaluation in their reading, writing, as well as classroom talk, i.e., in instruction across the board.

IV. Implications for Writing

Like classroom discourse, the potential of school writing for substantive engagement depends largely on the tasks and questions teachers pose for their students, and how they respond to what students have to say. If they read student papers only for spelling and punctuation and matters of form, student engagement is likely to be only procedural. Similarly, if the purpose of written assignments is mainly to report previously learned material, as on a test, student engagement will also be procedural.

In many English classes, students learn exposition by practicing a pedagogical form known as the five-paragraph theme, requiring an introductory paragraph, a three-paragraph body (each paragraph developing a main point or topic sentence), and a concluding paragraph. This format often precludes substantive student engagement since it assumes that all essays categorically have three main points regardless of the writer's purpose. This approach to teaching exposition trivializes essay writing in terms of a recipe, a particular procedure, and too often promotes procedural engagement at the expense of substantive engagement, as do all types of writing instruction in which content, substance, and writer purpose are subjugated to form and procedure. Britton et al. (1975) call these writing tasks, which are endemic to schools, **dummy runs.**

For students to become substantively engaged in their writing, they must write for a reader who takes a serious interest in what they say, certainly someone who does more than judge

exposition by number of paragraphs. This does not mean that teachers must encourage and praise "any old thing" that students say; rather they respond to the content of student papers, asking questions where students are unclear and prompting them to develop points that seem important.

Substantive engagement in school writing is difficult to achieve. This is largely due to the situation in which the teacher, by definition, is an expert and the students are novices. Hence, when teachers ask their students to explain "if there are any examples of Scottish dialects in Burns' poems" or "the main features of Elizabethan sonnets," they do so not to find out about these things (as in authentic discourse) but rather to assess student knowledge of these things (cf. Applebee, 1982). Ideally, substantive engagement is fostered in school writing when the ostensible and actual purposes of the writing are the same, for example, when teacher requests for explanations are authentic.

One kind of writing that potentially promotes substantive engagement is the position paper that some social studies and English teachers ask their students to write, in which students must articulate their views on social issues that seem important to them. Such assignments are typically authentic since the teacher doesn't evaluate them looking for particular answers. Applebee and Langer (1983; Langer and Applebee, 1984, 1986) have argued that such writing tasks promote student "ownership" because they afford students considerable flexibility concerning the content they cover and the views they express. Sometimes these position papers are assigned at the end of an involved class discussion when students have staked out their positions. Alternatively, the teacher may ask students to articulate their views in writing before class in order to heighten engagement during the discussion itself. Either way, this conjunction

of writing and discussion serves a role very much like uptake in classroom talk: it increases the coherence of instructional activities as they relate to each other.

Another related kind of writing that often promotes substantive engagement is student journal keeping. When teachers ask students to keep journals, they typically ask them to write once a day for 15-20 minutes on topics of importance to them. Teachers usually don't mark these journals for punctuation, spelling, or content, and consequently do not grade them (though they often count them for credit), but rather respond to individual entries with conversational kinds of remarks (e.g., "Very interesting. I've never thought of that," "Why do you say that?", "When you thought about this the next day, how did it seem then?", "I can remember doing this," "I'm laughing"). The cumulative effect of journal entries and teacher responses is that of a written dialogue or conversation; indeed keeping journals is sometimes called **dialogue-journal communication** (cf. Staton, Shuy, Kreeft Peyton, and Reed, 1988) since students and teachers take turns speaking just as conversants do. Journals are often effective with reluctant learners, and though they probably do not teach students very much about other, more formal kinds of school writing such as essays or tests, they nonetheless give students practice and help them feel comfortable with a medium that is often frustrating and difficult. More than this, journals allow each student to get to know her teacher as someone who is interested in her thoughts and listens to what she has to say. In short, journal keeping promotes substantive engagement and an instructional tone that potentially benefits students when they do other sorts of writing.

Reading is authentic when it addresses questions that students deem important, teaching them new things that they value, and also to the extent that teachers help students relate their readings to their own experiences. Reading will contribute to instructional coherence when

students discuss and write about their readings -- in other words, to the extent that reading relates to talk and writing.

Of course, no given instructional activity categorically promotes either procedural or substantive engagement. The nature of student engagement always depends, in the final analysis, on the nature of the interaction between teacher and students. Hence, position papers tend to elicit substantive engagement but will not do so if they expect the teacher to mark them only for spelling or doesn't respond at all. By contrast, five-paragraph themes tend to promote procedural engagement, but this engagement can be substantive if the teacher thoughtfully responds to what students say and allows students some latitude on just how many paragraphs their papers must have.

V. Student Engagement and Literature Achievement

Substantively engaging instruction fosters achievement more fully than does instruction that is merely procedurally engaging. Theoretical support for this proposition originates with the principle of reciprocity: instruction, like any form of interaction, requires give-and-take between participants (Nystrand, 1986, 1990). When reciprocity is merely procedural, students concentrate on procedures. By contrast, when reciprocity is substantive, students become involved in the issues and problems required for mastery and understanding. In short, when reciprocity is substantive, teachers and students communicate more fully. Beyond this, when reciprocity is procedural, students have little stake in learning the material aside from extrinsic rewards and sanctions. By contrast, when teacher-student reciprocity concerns the substance of academic issues, students play an essential role in their own learning -- experiencing

"ownership," some would say (e.g., Applebee, 1986) -- and as they grapple seriously with the academic content, their learning surpasses what is required to satisfy grade requirements.

Empirical support for our claim comes from analyses of the eighth-grade classes in our study. We administered a test of literature achievement, which contained questions about the literary selections used in each class. The questions were the same on each test -- ranging from ones that required simple recall to others that called for in-depth understanding -- but the selections they concerned varied, depending on the literature curriculum of each class. Higher scores thus indicated greater mastery of the literature students studied. More information on the tests and analyses is available elsewhere (Nystrand and Gamoran, in press; Gamoran, 1989; Nystrand, in press).

Not surprisingly, we found that disengaged students failed to learn much. Students who were offtask in class, and who did not turn in their work, were seriously impeded. A more interesting finding results from the comparison of procedural and substantive engagement. Procedural engagement had an ambiguous relation to achievement: students who spent more time on homework learned more, but those who asked questions in class and whose classes showed high rates of on-task behavior did not learn more than other students. Such measures of student behavior, we believe, conflate procedural and substantive engagement, and this is why their relation to achievement is unclear.

By contrast, several measures of substantive engagement showed clear effects on achievement. Students whose teachers posed higher proportions of authentic questions and used uptake achieved significantly higher scores. Coherent lessons, in which activities are related to one another rather than fragmented, also resulted in higher scores on the literature test.

When we divided the test results into separate scores for recall of information and depth of understanding, we found that both recall and depth require procedural engagement and uptake, but that depth requires authentic discourse as well. Last, we discovered that the effects of writing frequency depends on the type of writing: more frequent essays promote higher achievement, whereas more frequent short-answer assignments do not.

Conclusion

One can think of student engagement as a cognitive phenomenon essentially having to do with the extent to which students are mentally involved with the issues and problems of academic study. Hence, it may be considered in terms of sustained mental concentration, focus, and habits of thoughtfulness (Newmann, Onosko, & Stevenson, 1988). But like most aspects of cognition, student engagement has a social foundation. Substantive student engagement occurs only in certain contexts and involves more than individual students: more precisely, it involves the interaction of students and teachers. This requirement for interaction clearly underlies the social nature of instruction.

Student engagement poses some puzzles for both teachers and researchers. On the one hand, it underscores the importance of individual student effort and commitment to schooling. And clearly, when we speak of student engagement, we have in mind individual students, not classes. Yet despite the fact that student engagement refers to the cognition of individual students, we seem unable to detect it or adequately describe its manifestations except in relation to the interactions of students with their teachers or with other students. When we attempt to describe what individually engaged students do or look like, we inevitably limit ourselves to describing procedural engagement: as noted, we speak of students who appear to be paying

attention, who do their work, who ask questions in class, and so on. By contrast, in order to describe substantively engaging instruction, we must turn to the particular conditions of the class and its discourse. Some relevant questions include: When students respond to teacher questions, does the teacher follow up on their responses? How much latitude do students have in answering teacher questions? Do these questions mainly test their knowledge of what other people have thought and said, or do they respectfully elicit and follow up on actual thinking? Does classroom discourse tend more towards recitation or more towards conversation?

Substantive engagement requires, on the one hand, more of teachers than transmitting important knowledge and presenting good lessons, and, on the other hand, more of students than paying attention, taking in information, and doing their work. More fundamentally, substantive student engagement depends on what teachers and students do together and how they work in terms of each other; neither can do it alone. Nonetheless, teachers are key to creating classrooms where students become engaged in challenging issues and interesting topics. In the classroom, certain discourse practices elicit substantive student engagement. When they ask authentic questions, teachers open the floor to students and establish ground rules of classroom talk that prize student opinion and thinking. Through uptake, teachers help students develop a train of thought, and through high-level teacher evaluation teachers publicly demonstrate their regard for this thinking. Each of these practices moves classroom discourse away from recitation and towards conversation; the result is coherent instruction and learning, as shared understandings are elaborated, built upon, and revised.

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